

January 29, 1746-7, O. S.

February 9, 1897, N. S.

ADDRESS

Delivered on the

One Hundred and Fiftieth Birthday

—OF—

The First Church of Christ

IN PEPPERELL,

February 9, 1897,

BY EMELINE HARRINGTON,

Minister of the First Parish.

1897,

PRESS OF THE PEPPERELL PRINTING COMPANY,

EAST PEPPERELL, MASS.

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June 11, 1936

PROGRAM.

Organ Voluntary, "Festival Hymn,"
 MRS. JOHN O. BENNETT
 Anthem, "The Earth is the Lord's and the
 Fullness Thereof," CHOIR
 Scripture Selection, REV. A. J. RICH
 Extracts from Church Records,
 REV. EMELINE HARRINGTON
 Selection from Rev. Chas. Babbidge's Cen-
 tennial Address, REV. GRANVILLE PIERCE
 Anthem, "Hear me, O Father, CHOIR
 Address, REV. EMELINE HARRINGTON
 Platform meeting,
 REV. GEO S. SHAW.
 REV. A. J. RICH, original poem addressed to Dr.
 Babbidge.
 REV. CHARLES BABBIDGE, D. D.
 REV. I. F. PORTER.
 REV. JOSHUA YOUNG, D. D., Message of congrat-
 ulation from the First Church in Groton.
 MR. N. S. SHATTUCK.
 Anthem, "Laus Deo, CHOIR
 Benediction, REV. CHAS. BABBIDGE, D. D.

CHOIR.

Organist, Mrs. John O. Bennett.
 Sopranos, Mesdames Lucy B. Page, Ida Mason, Laura
 E. Parker.
 Altos, Mesdames Katherine Shattuck, Maud Mason,
 Jennie R. Drury.
 Tenors, Messrs. Dana Bancroft, Charles F. Spaulding,
 N. S. Shattuck.
 Bassos, Messrs. Walter Drury, George Page, Junius
 Shattuck.

The first settlements of whites in the region now known as Pepperell were made as early as 1720. Their numbers grew slowly for the next twenty years. In 1740 the settlement contained over forty families still under the fostering care of Groton. The miles between them and their church home seemed especially long in bad weather. On this account they desired a church in their midst and petitioned for the erection of a new parish.

Their wish was not granted however till 1742. The portion lying west of the Nashua river and north of the country road as travelled a century and a half ago was set off as a distinct precinct and called Groton West Parish. (See history of G., P. and S. as before, p. 305.)

The first legal meeting of the new Parish, January 17th, 1742, provided for necessary expenses by voting an assessment of ten pounds. The second meeting, held February 16th of the same year, decided upon building a meeting house. Differences of opinion as to the proper location were decided by the interference of the "Great and General Court," and not until the early part of 1745 was the building ready for occupation, though even then unfinished. Some time elapsed before the call of the Parish to a minister was accepted, but on January 29th, 1746-7, O. S., a church was gathered, and a month later Rev. Joseph Emerson was ordained and settled over it. He probably suggested the name which the town now bears when the precinct became a district in 1753.

The first meeting house served the uses of the Parish about twenty-five years. It stood upon *this spot* until 1769, when it was removed, and the present building erected in its stead, a monument to the faith-

ful work of the forefathers. The whole interior arrangement was altered in 1836, between July 31st and October 27th. Repairs were made in 1852, and again some seven or eight years ago.

We can hardly imagine the deprivations and hardships of those early days. As a precaution against Indians it was necessary to carry weapons to church. The first building could have been little better than a shanty. It was made more complete at intervals as the Parish could afford to spend time and money upon it, but there are doubts whether it was ever completed, and it probably required very slight changes to convert it into the barn which was finally burned by an incendiary. Great zeal must have been necessary to keep people warm through the long services that were then customary, for stoves were not introduced into this church until 1826, and then only against great opposition. After that event, the noon-houses, of which there were eight within a radius of twenty rods of the common, gradually disappeared. In their day however, the pleasant chat before those glowing fires helped greatly to relieve the tedium of the period between services for those who lived at a distance.

Fidelity to history compels the admission that the congregation which worshipped in this house until the secession in 1832 was composed of various elements mixed in a proportion which was not wholly peaceful, as indicated in the matter of choosing a site for the first meeting house, heating the church in 1826, and frequent disciplining of members, but since that separation, the remainder has maintained the utmost internal harmony.

The division took place during the incumbency of the third minister. The peace-loving element, which

held the balance of power in the parish and secured long tenure of office of its ministers, evidently continued in possession, for the custom is still maintained. The very first minister secured by the church after the secession of Mr. Howe and his followers remained in active service fifty-three years, and since his retirement, continues as Pastor Emeritus, to guide by his example, rouse by his enthusiasm, and cheer by his sympathy, the flock he has led so long and faithfully. His successors in the active work of the ministry have been Rev. Walter Clifford Moore, deceased, Rev. Albert C. White, now of Ware, and the present incumbent. The seceders have changed ministers eleven times since 1832.

It appears, from Dr. Babbidge's centennial address, portions of which have just been read, that several facts were established full fifty years ago. Any denial of them now must originate in forgetfulness, in ignorance, or in misconstruction.

Forgetfulness is improbable—on the part of those who were alive and present through that exciting time. Ignorance is inexcusable—on the part of those who have risked the disturbance of peaceful relations so lately existing by reviving the old controversy. Misconstruction must be due to obliquity of mental vision which it is our aim to correct.

In brief, the points set forth by Dr. Babbidge in that long-since-historic document may be summed up thus:—

1st. The true anniversary of the organization of the Church of Christ in Pepperell occurs on February 9th, and not on January 29th.

2nd. To the church connected with the First Parish belongs the right to be called the First Church of Christ in Pepperell—

(a) Because of the character of the original church

as defined in accordance with the authority of Jesus :

(*b*) Because of the persistence of that character in an unbroken succession of communicants;

(*c*) Because the right to the name remained undisputed until some time after the organization of another church.

3d. The claim of the Second Church to identity with the original church cannot be sustained—

(*a*) On the score of believing as the church had always believed; because the creed of the Second Church not only differed from the covenant of the founders, but it differed from the creed of the First Church in the time of Rev. John Bullard, the second minister and immediate predecessor of Mr. Howe;

(*b*) On the score of numbers; because a few worshippers as truly constitute a church as do many, and, while a majority of the original church had a right to withdraw and did so, they had no right to compel others to withdraw, and, as a matter of fact, some remained faithful to their vows, continuing to worship where they had worshipped for years, and maintaining the Christian ordinances without interruption.

(*c*) On the score of the seceders having taken the officers with them; because officers are not essential to the existence of a church, and because, had those who remained chosen to excommunicate those who withdrew, such action would have been within the ecclesiastical power of the church which remained in connection with the First Parish,

Those who withdrew broke their vows. Those who remained kept their vows. Those who withdrew dissolved the connection of the church only so far as they themselves were concerned, without destroying the church connection of those who remained. A portion

denominated the Liberal party desired the minister not to refuse exchanges with his liberal neighbors. On the occasion of his ordination he expressed willingness to respect their wishes, and it was his refusal to continue such action that led to the vote in Town meeting so often referred to. This vote was in defense of established and customary rights, and not in any way a curtailment of privilege. Rather than allow the liberals to hear neighboring liberal ministers six times during the year and bear the expense of such services themselves without diminishing Mr. Howe's salary, the exclusive party withdrew and established an Evangelical Congregational Society.

4th. The cause of division was not injustice toward the party that withdrew, but resistance of its attempt to oppress the party that remained.

So much for Dr. Babbidge's address, but the evidence is all on one side, and the only difficulty is one of choice amid such a wealth of valuable material.

The right of the church connected with the original Parish to claim identity with the original church was established in 1820—twelve years before the secession in Pepperell—by a decision of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, from which an extract here follows:—
 "As to all civil purposes, the secession of a whole church from the parish would be an extinction of the church, and it is competent to the members of the parish to institute a new church, or to organize one upon the old stock if any of it should remain; and their new church would succeed to all the rights of the old in relation to the parish. . . . No particular number is necessary to constitute a church, nor is there any established quorum which would have a right to manage the concerns of the body. . . . It would seem to

follow from the very structure of such a body as this which is a mere voluntary association, that a diminution of its numbers will not affect its identity. A church may exist in an ecclesiastical sense without any officers. . . . And without doubt, in the same sense a church may be composed of *femes covert* and miners, who have no civil capacity. The only circumstance therefore which gives a church any legal character is its connection with some legally constituted society; and those who withdraw from the society cease to be members of that particular church."

[The curious may find this decision complete in Massachusetts reports of cases argued and determined in the Supreme Judicial Court, Vol. xvi., pp. 503-4. It is the "Celebrated Dedham Case."]

That the identity of this church with the original church was generally recognized by people acquainted with the circumstances, but living at a distance, is shown by the following letter, accompanying the gift of this pulpit Bible :

"BOSTON, Nov. 17, 1836.

"*Rev. Sir:*

With this you will receive the Holy Bible, in two volumes, for the use of the pulpit of the first church and society in Pepperell, under your pastoral care, which is presented in memory of my respected father, the late Rev. John Bullard, your predecessor.

"Most respectfully,

"ELIZABETH BASS.

"Rev. Charles Babbidge."

Most of the questions already alluded to are settled, you perceive, by the restatement of facts just made—but not all.

"Why stir this matter up at all?" some one asks. Why indeed? *We* have not done so. We would never have been the first to move in the direction of opening an old controversy. The mere hint that there had been a misunderstanding was sufficient to hush all reference to a possible celebration, made some months ago by a new-comer in the First Parish. We would have let the anniversary pass unnoticed if others had refrained; but to do so now would argue a lack of right or a lack of interest, neither of which exists.

We have not opened the question. If the consequences of doing so are not wholly pleasant others are responsible and not we. Then comes another question: "If the organization of the Church of Christ in Pepperell is to be celebrated, why is it not a Town affair?" And again the answer is: To be sure, why not? The Town and the Parish were one and the same to begin with. It ought to be of interest to all public-spirited citizens. But in these days the Town is not a parish, and appears to have forgotten its beginnings. Interest in politics is not necessarily an interest in religion, though a *true interest in religion is an interest in politics*. Highways, and water supply and lights absorb all the energies of the City Fathers. They do not care enough about antiquarian relics to make any effort toward rescuing the past from oblivion. Manifestly the impulse toward a recognition of such an incident as the organization of a church, even though it were the most important event in the founding of the Town, is not to be expected from them; neither can the citizens at large be looked to for the beginning of such a movement, they not having frequent occasion to examine records and verify dates. It must start in a church, if at all. It could come with a good grace only from the First Church, which refrained

out of a desire for peace, and misgivings as to how such a suggestion would be received in the light of past experiences.

Another query: "Is not one festival enough?" Yes, if it is a joint celebration in which the rights of all interested parties are regarded; but under existing circumstances the arrangement for such an anniversary required *tact*.

"Why did not the First Parish accept the invitation to attend the festival of the Second Church?"

1st. The day selected was not the anniversary of the church. History must be falsified to adopt it. The First Church could not celebrate on January 29th without tacitly admitting unfounded assumptions and withdrawing from the position it has occupied ever since 1832.

2d. The Second Church chose its own day and its own speakers, arranged its own program, ignoring the at least equal interest of the First Church, asking no advice or assistance, and intimating no withdrawal from the false position taken fifty years ago—that it is *The* (original) Church of Christ in Pepperell. Such being the method of procedure it could hardly have been expected that ordinary self-respect would permit the acceptance of its invitation.

3d. The one person now living of chiefest importance in such a celebration—because fourth in succession of the ministers of the original church and personally connected with the First Church as active pastor for fifty-three years, and as Pastor Emeritus even to the present time, who is among you to-day, with unimpaired memory and reason and feeling, revered by all for his noble and beautiful life—*was* not and *could* not be especially invited to such a celebration. To have asked him

to be present on January 29th would have been equivalent to asking him to retract his address of fifty years ago, brand himself a liar, and stigmatize as a usurper the church which he then defended. No one had the effrontery to do this. For the Church and Parish to have accepted that invitation would have been to withdraw their countenance from their leader in his age and commit an act of baseness of which they are incapable.

It has been asked also: "Does it matter which is the direct successor of the original church?" It did matter in 1832, when reliance upon a decree of the Supreme Court was necessary to recover from the Second Church the records and the communion service which you see before you, and restore them to their rightful owners, in whose hands they have remained ever since. What has happened once may occur again.

Having answered several questions, the privilege may now be granted of asking a few. If it is customary to celebrate anniversaries according to the style of reckoning time that was in use when the event occurred, why is it that the Landing of the Pilgrims which took place December 11, 1620, O. S., is commemorated on December 22d, N. S.? Why is it that Washington's Birthday is February 22d, when every one knows he was born February 11th, 1732, O. S.? If one persists in using the Old Style in counting the *days*, why not in numbering the *years* also? According to O. S. the year began March 25th, instead of January 1st. Then the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of January 29th, 1746-7, O. S., would be January 29th; 1896-7, O. S., or February 9th, 1897, N. S..

And again; if the Second Church did not reorganize after the secession in 1832, how can its members claim to have *any* organization, having dis-

solved that which they previously had by breaking their solemn covenant? If on the other hand, an organization was effected after the division, it must be a *new* organization, and can lay no just claim to the title which continued in the possession of the church still connected with the First Parish by unbroken succession.

Another question: Who signed the remonstrance in favor of the ordination of Mr. Howe? The remonstrance *against* his ordination was signed by seventy-nine persons, all of whom were voters, with the possible exception of one. That these seventy-nine constituted a majority of the Parish, (the Parish and Town were identical) is evident from the recognized necessity of removing their objections before the ordination could proceed. Had the one hundred and forty-four remonstrants in *favor* of the ordination all been voters the seventy-nine *against* it would have had no force to compel the hesitation of the Council. Besides there is every reason to believe that the Town did not contain two hundred and twenty-three voters. Who then were the one hundred and forty-four? Were a part of them children? History is silent.

A letter from the State House, received not long ago, inquired how a church claiming to be one hundred and fifty years old could have been formed from another not half as old. This is indeed a puzzle, but Note K, appended to Mr. Andrews discourse, delivered January 29th, 1847, says: "The Union Church in Groton, with its pastor, Rev. Dudley Phelps, was present by invitation on account of the original relation which subsisted between the two churches in Groton and Pepperell, the one having been formed from the other." Recalling the fact that the Union Church of Groton was formed November 21st, 1826, it is difficult to explain how

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PARISH COMMITTEE.

George G. Tarbell for 1896-7.

N. S. Shattuck,

Harriet E. Richardson.

CLERK—Edgar W. Blake,

TREASURER—Charles B. Taft.

COLLECTOR—Laura E. Parker.

MEMBERS OF THE FIRST PARISH.

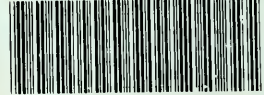
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Mr. George T. Bancroft,	Mr. Levi Sartelle,
Mr. Henry Blake,	Mr. Benjamin F. Sartelle,
Mr. G. Dana Bancroft,	Mr. John Sartelle,
Mr. Lorenzo P. Blood,	Mr. Nathaniel S. Shattuck,
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Mr. Luther Fitch,	Mr. William P. Taylor,
Mr. William F. Heald,	Mr. Charles B. Taft,
Mr. Charles B. Heald,	Mr. Christopher G. Worcester
Mr. W. B. Page,	Mr. Henry Wright,
Mr. Edwin R. Richardson,	Mr. Addison Woodward.

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Mrs. Edgar W. Blake.	Mrs. Edwin R. Richardson,
Mrs. Charles Blood,	Mrs. Levi Sartelle,
Mrs. Carrie Fletcher Greno,	Mrs. Harry Shattuck,
Mrs. William F. Heald,	Mrs. Nellie Tarbell,
Rev. Emeline Harrington,	Mrs. Harriet L. Wright.
Mrs. Walter B. Page,	Mrs. L. Frederick Williams,
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